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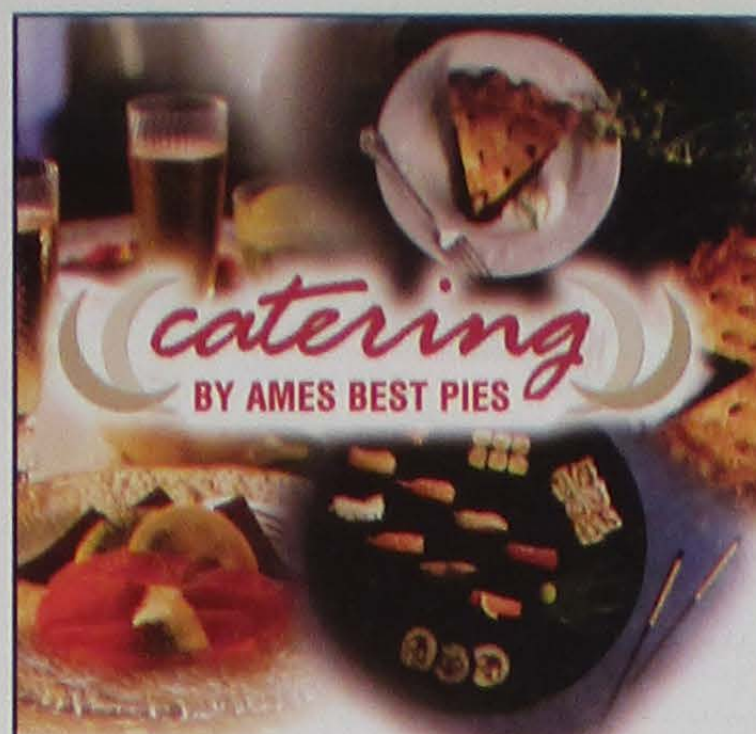
Facet - 1. One of the flat surfaces cut on a gemstone.
2. The particular angle from which something is considered.

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december calendar

TUESDAY, DEC. 2

An **arts and crafts sale** will be from 12 to 5 p.m. at the Maintenance Shop on the ISU campus. Student artwork, perfect for holiday gifts, will be for sale. Event is sponsored by the Workspace. For more information, call (515) 294-8349

Stephens Auditorium welcomes **Willie Nelson and Family** in concert with special guest Billy Bob Thornton and the Boxmasters. Tickets are available at the Iowa State Center ticket office, all Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com, or charge by phone at (515) 243-1888. Tickets are \$77.50, \$51.50 and \$41.50. Doors open at 6:30, concert begins at 7:30 p.m. Stephens Auditorium is located at the corner of Lincoln Way and Beach Avenue in Ames.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3

An **AIDS Quilt Exhibit** will be at the Great Hall and Ballrooms in the Memorial Union on the Iowa State University campus. The Quilt has redefined the tradition of quilt-making in response to contemporary circumstances. A memorial, a tool for education and a work of art, the Quilt is a unique creation, an uncommon and uplifting response to the tragic loss of human life. Founded in 1987, The AIDS Memorial Quilt is a poignant memorial, a powerful tool for use in preventing new HIV infections, and the largest ongoing community arts project in the world. The exhibit will feature 20 quilts, each "block" twelve feet square, with about eight individual panels sewn together. There will be 160 panels dedicated to someone who has lost a life to AIDS. Admission is free. For more information, call (515) 294-8081.

A Performing Arts Series at Stephens event set on the glorious, glamorous French Riviera, **"Dirty Rotten Scoundrels"** is a delicious comedy that follows two con artists as they take on the lifestyle of the rich and shameless -- and end up with a lot more than they bargained for. Based on the popular 1988 film, "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" opened on Broadway in 2005 to rave reviews. Clive Barnes (New York Post) called it "A knockout punch to Broadway's funny bone! One of the liveliest, funniest, best-performed musicals in years. Super-smart and superior in every way." The comedy, which earned 11 Tony Award nominations, including Best Musical, features the music and lyrics of David Yazbek ("The Full Monty"), direction by Philip Wm. McKinley, choreography by Vince Pesce, and book by Jeffrey Lane. Parental discretion is advised. Doors open at 2:15 p.m., the show starts at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$47 and \$43 for adults; \$25 for youth; and \$20 for ISU students. Groups of 15 or more receive a \$5 per ticket discount and one complimentary ticket. Tickets are available at the Iowa State Center ticket office, all Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com, or charge by phone at (515) 243-1888.

THURSDAY, DEC. 4

Wreath Making Workshop Session II will be offered at 6:30 p.m. at Reiman Gardens. Learn how to assemble a holiday wreath with Reiman Gardens' staff. They will guide you through the steps to use evergreens, specialty greens, and other materials to create your own seasonal decoration for your home. Cost is \$30 for CoHorts' members; \$37.50 for general public. Pre-registration and pre-payment required. For more information, call (515) 294-2710.

FRIDAY, DEC. 5

Blossoms of Light at Reiman Gardens from 5 to 8 p.m. Family activities will be offered and Santa will be in attendance. For more information, call (515) 294-2710.

From the novel by Charles Dickens, **"A Christmas Carol"** comes to Fisher Theater. It is Christmas Eve and the hardhearted miser, Ebenezer Scrooge is sharing his views on work and money with his nephew and an employee, Bob Cratchit. Later that night, Scrooge is visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future all of whom try to bring him to redemption. This well-loved story continues to be a holiday favorite for the entire family. Doors open at 6:45 p.m., the show begins at 7:30 p.m. Ticket prices: \$14 adult, \$2 discount for seniors 65 and older, \$7 discount for ISU students and youth 18 and under. Tickets are available at the Iowa State Center ticket office, all Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com, or charge by phone at (515) 243-1888.

THURSDAY, DEC. 11

"A Christmas Cup of Tea" will be presented by Deb Mortvedt during a Brown Bag Lecture at noon at Reiman Gardens. Bring your lunch to the Garden and enjoy an education program. CoHorts' members are admitted free. For more information, call (515) 294-2710.

FRIDAY, DEC. 12

"Pied Piper, The Musical" will be presented Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m. and Dec. 13 and 14 at 3 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Directors are Cynthia Marten and Keith Wirtz. The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ames is at 1015 Hyland Ave.

Stephens Auditorium welcomes **"The Nutcracker Ballet."** This is the Iowa State Center's 28th-anniversary production of the time-honored ballet. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. with the show starting at 7:30 p.m. Ticket prices: adults \$19 and 17; ISU Students/18 and under/seniors 55 and older receive a \$2 discount. Groups of 10 or more receive a \$2 per ticket discount. Tickets are available at the Iowa State Center ticket office, all Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com, or charge by phone at (515) 243-1888.

THURSDAY, DEC. 18

Stephens Auditorium presents **A Skaggs Family Christmas**, sponsored by Country Landscapes, Inc. A Performing Arts Series at Stephens event, this heartwarming musical celebration of the season features a mix of traditional bluegrass and acoustic favorites with Ricky Skaggs and his talented family. Join the fun as bluegrass master and eleven-time Grammy Award winner Skaggs, along with his all-star band Kentucky Thunder, the Whites (Buck White, Cheryl White and Sharon White-Skaggs), and a third generation of family members (Ricky and Sharon's children, Molly and Luke, and Rachel White) bring a down-home holiday party to Stephens Auditorium. With an engaging blend of spiritual and secular holiday fare, A Skaggs Family Christmas will create a truly memorable holiday experience for the entire family. Doors open at 2:15 p.m., the event begins at 3 p.m. Ticket prices are adults \$45, \$41; youth \$24; and ISU students \$20. Tickets are available at the Iowa State Center ticket office, all Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com, or charge by phone at (515) 243-1888.



Photos by RONNIE MILLER/Facets

Women in 'GOOD COMPANY' *in community choir*

By MARY HALSTRUM
Facets Editor

When Good Company choir was founded back in January 1993, Doris Nash was one of its charter members. "Good Company sort of fills a niche. There are other audition choirs in town, but this is the only women's choir," said Nash, president of Good Company.

Nash said sometimes there is an overlap between Good Company members and Ames Choral Society members. However, the choirs are dramatically different in size with Good Company averaging between 20 and 24 members, and the Ames Choral Society averaging around 60 members at any one time.

"The music we perform really runs the gamut from religious to pop to Broadway tunes," Nash said. "Good Company is filled with great singers committed to working at their singing."

Martha Tanner is currently in her second year with Good Company.

"I really enjoy it. Everyone's very musical and our voices blend well. It's fun to hear how it all comes together during the concerts," Tanner said. "The choir is a nice size because you can really hear how all of the sections blend together."

Funding for expenses such as renting practice space, paying an accompanist and hiring a composer comes from member dues, grants and private donations, Nash said.

The choir has been rehearsing since September for its upcoming winter concert, set for 7 p.m. Dec. 7 at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Ames. Tickets are \$8 and can be purchased from Good Company choir members and at Gallery 319 in downtown Ames. The choir will also perform a spring concert in early May 2009.



MAKE IT A HEALTHY HOLIDAY

Do you want to lose weight this holiday season? Holiday parties can present a challenge when it comes to losing weight; in fact, deciding to lose weight over the holidays may be a losing game. Strive to maintain your weight instead. Use the following tips to help you enjoy the holiday season without adding inches to your waistline.



Plan ahead. A calendar can help you keep track of holiday meals and parties. Make an effort to eat lighter on the days before and after these events so you can balance the calories and fat in your party food. On the day of the party, balance what you eat with other meals throughout the day. If your holiday meal is at 5 p.m., eat a small, lower-calorie breakfast and lunch so you can enjoy your favorites without overindulging. Be careful not to skip an entire meal in anticipation of a party — you'll end up eating more. Nibble on something before you leave the house so you are not overly hungry. Try snacking on fresh fruit or vegetables, light yogurt, whole grain crackers or mozzarella string cheese before the party. At the party, contribute your favorite healthy dish.

Fill up on high-protein and high-fiber foods first.

Foods such as lean meats, raw veggies and whole grains contain sufficient bulk to help fill you up ... leaving less room for overindulgence on empty calories in sugar-filled goodies. If you do enjoy those calorie-dense goodies, focus on the amount you take, keeping the portion size small. Also, avoid salty snacks. They can make you eat and drink more.

Savor every bite. Eating slowly reduces your chances of eating too much. It takes 20 minutes for the stomach to signal to the brain that you're full.

Don't cut your favorite holiday treats completely out. If you don't allow yourself the occasional small indulgence, you will be much more likely to break down and binge on all those favorite foods or treats. The key is to enjoy small portions or bites of your favorite foods.

Beware of "liquid calories." Eggnog can have up to 400 calories per glass. The average can of beer or soda has 150 calories. Hard liquor contains about 175 calories in just two ounces and wine contributes 80 calories per half-cup. Reach for low-calorie or calorie-free beverages when possible and save your calories for a special holiday treat. Fill up on water, and if you want more flavor, try the on-the-go flavored packets that have added fiber or protein.

Be the life of the party.

Stay active by focusing on party activities or spark conversation away from the food table. Putting some distance between you and the chow creates a much-needed obstacle between you and the calories.

Get moving. Keep a regular exercise routine. Use the busy shopping season and burn some extra calories. If you are heading to the mall, park further away, or take your time and do a round of window shopping all through the mall before you buy. This will help burn off extra calories and work off some of the holiday stresses and strains.



So, enjoy the season and all the wonderful foods that come with this special time of year. Just

don't forget about balance, moderation and portion control. To receive additional healthy holiday tips, contact your Ames Hy-Vee dietitian, Amy Clark, by calling (515) 450-0508 or e-mail 1013dietitian@hy-vee.com.

This information is not intended as medical advice. Please consult a medical professional for individual advice.

Wrap it up!

By DEBRA ATKINSON

The holidays are full of tradition, unfortunately, among them is exercising less. Let's face it, in the Midwest the weather makes it more challenging at least once during the stretch of the run we call "the holidays." The shopping, the wrapping, the decorating, the entertaining, and the otherwise extra to-do list, either real or imagined, fights for exercise time directly or indirectly. You may not be trading your workout for these activities, but enjoying them sometimes causes you not to be at your exercise best when it's time to lace up the shoes.

Given that the exercise crunch comes at a time when caloric abundance is at its best, come January is it a wonder that there can be a problem? The traditional 7-12 pounds that ends up around your middle or on your thighs isn't just a vanity concern any more. The risk to your heart, your risk of cancer, and your energy to get through each and every day is high.

How many times have you enthusiastically jumped on the bandwagon to support good causes

with your donations, attendance, purchases and good will? Yet have you put an equal or greater effort into protecting yourself by exercising and your choice of fuel? All the research in the world is useful only once you get the disease. Prevention is the other side of the coin. There is plenty of evidence to support that although exercise may not prevent disease entirely; it can give you a shield against disease by strengthening your immune system, and in a society so much more filled with toxins than ever before that's crucial.

While you're wrapping up your carefully chosen gifts this year, give yourself a decorative wrapping. Beyond the outfit you chose for the party, find a way to exercise that takes care of you from the inside out. The paper on the box saves the surprise for the moment you want it. You can similarly shield yourself from illness if you choose to do so. There are no guarantees but you can control some things and by doing so reduce the chance that a surprise will ruin your plans.

Just a few tips for making your holidays more jolly both now and again in January:

Drink lots of water.

When you spend more time inside and the air is dry you need more water whether you're exercising or not. If you've indulged in a few hors d'oeuvres at the company party you have probably consumed a bit more sodium than usual as well, so additional water will help you lose the extra fluid retained.

Get up and get moving.

First thing in the morning before the stores open, before work and the office party or the kids' pageant, is the best time to get your exercise done. Later in the day, things will happen and your exercise time is more difficult to protect. No one loves to get up in the dark. But anyone who gets up to exercise will tell you afterwards that it was well worth it.

Make it count.

This is a perfect time to apply interval training to your routine. More effective for calorie burning and helping with fat losses, interval training can mean that 30 minutes of exercise can put more jingle in your bells than an hour of the same old speed. Unless you have a special condition or injury, you too can do interval training. Just don't expect it to look like your neighbor's exercise. Short periods of higher intensity work -- as determined by you -- followed by recovery periods define interval training. Sandwich that between a warm up and cool down and you can easily put in a very productive 30 minutes that keeps you on track and in the same dress size or belt loop come January.

Read On.

When gift giving is called for, look into books and request them yourself that fuel exercise know-how and motivation. The YOU series by doctors Oz and Roizen is full of ideas for everyone on your list from those who want to eliminate a few pounds for good to those who want some insight into what you may not even realize is aging you. New reads that will inspire the marathoner, triathlete, or adventurer in you and get you moving to reach a goal are worth the downtime to read them!





Holiday gifts for your skin

By KATHY COOK

Do we need to be reminded that the holidays are rapidly approaching? As women, we take care of the shopping, baking, decorating and holiday gatherings and want to look relaxed and glowing for those events. There are some common, easy, no down time procedures that can help you achieve those goals for the holidays and into the New Year.

Botox is the No. 1 cosmetic procedure because it has no down time and can be repeated as desired to maintain the effect. This consists of a few tiny injections into the muscle. Botox temporarily blocks nerve impulses that cause the muscle to contract. This allows the muscle to relax and avoid the frown between the eyebrows. Botox usually lasts three to four months. People who cannot have Botox are women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, have neuromuscular disorders, or are allergic to eggs. Risks

include bruising at the injection site and rare risk of temporary eyelid droop, swelling and redness. Men as well as women have Botox injections.

Microdermabrasion is done by several different methods to remove the very top portion of the skin for a more even appearance, and can reduce fine lines, age spots and acne and pore size. This may also stimulate collagen production for longer benefit. Skin immediately feels smoother. Results improve with a series of treatments.

Chemical peels can be done with microdermabrasion or by themselves to also remove a portion of the skin to help even out the skin tones, reduce fine lines and age spots. We utilize several different peels and some may not have visible peeling. A series of peels produces the best results. There are deeper peels which can have more effect on wrinkles but do involve some healing time and greater risks.

Wrinkle filler injections are growing in demand as they also provide immediate

benefit with little down time. There are many products approved in the U.S. and I use several based on the location and depth of wrinkles to be improved. A common area of use is the area between the nose and corner of the mouth called the nasolabial groove. Risks include mild temporary redness, swelling and injection site bruising.

Medical grade products can also help our skin appear more even and improve the function and structure of the skin. Antioxidants such as topically applied vitamin C and retinoids are common examples of such products. I evaluate a person's skin type and the amount of damage to determine what products to recommend. Some people are able to see improvements in as few as two weeks of use. These can also help maintain the results for some of the procedures already discussed.

Thermage is a single procedure that targets the underlying collagen which helps wrinkling and lax skin with results being seen over a six-month time frame that can last from 18 months to five years. This can be combined with other procedures that target the overlying skin for even greater results.

We also can target undesired small deposits of body fat and cellulite with **Velashape** which is a machine that takes on average four treatments spaced weekly for a good candidate.

There are multiple options for people who desire improvement in their appearance and many of these are simple and can be done with immediate effect. These are some of the options at my office that you can schedule ... or put on your wish list.

Kathy L. P. Cook, M.D., Board Certified Dermatologist, Skin Solutions Dermatology

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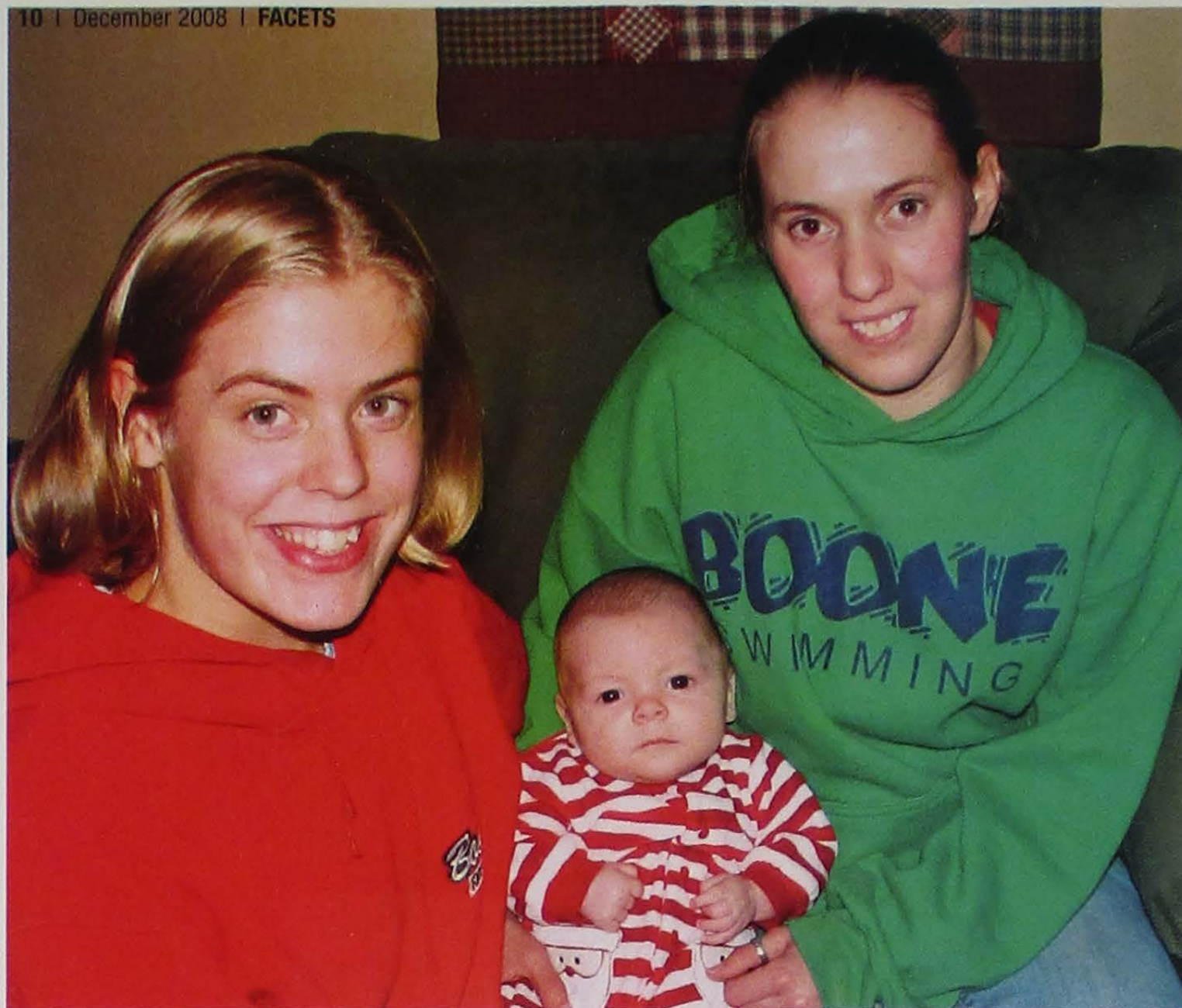


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Amber, left, and Sherry with new addition Noel.

A house full of **DREAMS**

By ANN GREEN

This Christmas season Matt and Julie Malin will hang the ornaments on their tree and decorate their large, Victorian home. Julie will make her Christmas crafts and take their teenage daughters shopping. Presents will be wrapped and placed under the tree; cookies will be baked and exchanged with friends. Then again, maybe the cookies won't get done, or the house so elaborately adorned. Since their son's birth, life moves at a different speed, a slower pace.

I was sitting at the Malin's dining room table; enjoying pizza and a Pepsi with them. Their eighteen-year-old daughter, Sherry, was busy doing homework in the computer room; while fourteen-year-old Amber watched a movie. The newest family member, two month-old Noel, was sprawled across Julie's lap. Outside the wind howled and the season's first snowflakes whipped past the windows. Inside, the lamps cast a cozy glow in their spacious home while we continued our discussion about adoption, specifically, open adoption. "We don't own our children. We are raising them," said Matt Malin.

Years ago, while doing a high school project, Julie drew up a list of things to accomplish by the ripe old age of 30. She figured she had all the time in the world.

Julie and Matt were married in 1991. For three years, they lived and worked in the Council Bluffs area. In 1994, they relocated to Boone. Julie focused on teaching first grade in the Boone School system; she was in the business of nurturing other peoples' children. Matt went back to school in pursuit of a computer programming degree. Together they bought their first house.

The Malins had a marriage, careers and a new home. When Julie turned 30 she realized her timeline had been fairly accurate, with the exception of one glaring omission. After almost 10 years of marriage, Julie and Matt were childless. They began to explore their options.

A conversation with Matt's co-worker started the ball rolling. The co-worker's sister was a foster parent and knew of two young girls needing a good home. Matt and Julie spent the following year working and attending foster classes. The year, 2001, proved to be a turning point for the couple. Eleven-year-old Sherry and her seven-year-old sister, Amber, came to live with them. The Malins' world blossomed to include little league, parent-teacher conferences, swim lessons, and birthday gatherings with the birth family.

On Aug. 18, 2002, adoption day, Sherry and Amber officially joined Matt and Julie's family. In choosing an open adoption, Matt and Julie recognized that in the end it would be good for the girls to maintain a relationship with their birth parents.

In a few short years, Sherry was off to middle school and the new parents realized driving lessons, homecoming dances and graduation were just around the corner. They'd waited so long for the girls and now time was passing by at the speed of light. They treasured their girls, but longed for a baby to complete their family.

When fertility tests ruled out any possibilities of conception and foster parenting did not result in a baby, the Malins turned to Catholic Charities. The couple spent another year attending adoption classes, creating a portfolio, and agonizing through home visitations. Along with seven other couples, the Malins were finally ready for the next step, showing their portfolio to potential birth mothers. The couple took solace in the organizations mantra, "It's not a matter of if you get a baby, but when you get one."

And so the journey began. There were the girls' swim meets and plays and other activities to attend. There were craft shows and woodworking projects to be completed. There were careers to be taken care of. And in between, they waited for the sporadic phone calls.

Eventually, the phone would ring. Sometimes the Malins were informed of upcoming meetings with potential birth mothers; sometimes they were told their portfolio was being shown; and sometimes Catholic Charities called to let them know a pregnant woman had narrowed it down and they were one of the final two choices. For two years Julie and Matt waited, hoped and prayed.

In the spring of 2007 they finally got the call they'd dreamed about. They'd been selected. There was a baby girl in need of a home. There was red tape to be waded through and legal matters to be settled, but they were hopeful the little girl would be with them soon. But it wasn't meant to be and the proceedings were dropped. The following fall, they were selected again. This time they were at the hospital when the baby boy was born. They spent two days holding him and feeding him. On the third day the birth parents changed their mind. Julie and Matt came home alone.

Those were the dark days; the hopeless days. But the couple made a conscious decision — they would not give up. And so the waiting and living continued. Then on Aug. 28, 2008, Noel Robert burst into their lives and made all the waiting worth while.

In a month the Malins' house will be illuminated with Christmas lights. The girls will be caught up in the holiday spirit, Noel will be dressed in his Christmas onesie, and Julie and Matt will be thankful for their family. After all they have learned, they remain steadfast. They know the drama of life will continue. They know there will be happy days and challenging days. Learning to treasure the good times is enough for them.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

All I want for Christmas
Is to celebrate with you, my sweet
Snowflakes and mistletoe
Candy canes and jinglebells
Hearts all aglow
Children singing, "Away In A Manger"
A heart's delight
O how I wish I could be with you this
Christmas night
A single star lights the sky
A frosty night shivers cold
As I lie here in the dark foxhole still
Listening to the far-distant strains of
silent night
Drifting over the frozen fields
My heart sighs deep and from the depths
cries out
With tears streaming down my cheeks
I press your dog-eared picture close
to my breast
And dream of holding you in my arms
once again
Until then, my dearest, kiss the wee little ones
and hold them tight
Then whisper a little prayer for me
And wish for them a Merry Christmas Night
Hold on to our promise
Hold on to it tight
For together forever in spirit we'll be
Look to the heavens
Where a star shines bright
Look to the star this Christmas Night
For that bright star will be a shining beacon
To guide us through the night
For when the day breaks forth
Together again we'll stand
Until that day, forever and always, darling mine
Forever and always you'll be mine

Submitted by Rose Elsbecker

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TAKE A HOME TOUR *this holiday season*

By MARY HALSTRUM
Facets Editor

Are you looking for something to do this holiday season other than Christmas shopping? The Holiday Home Tour 2008 is set for Dec. 6 and 7, and will feature five homes in Ames. The tour is the primary fundraiser for Altrusa International of Ames.

"We have a nice variety of homes this year," said Betty Boccella, tour chairperson.

Altrusa was founded in 1965, and, according to Boccella, is a professional women's service organization that is nonpartisan, nonsectarian and nonprofit, providing the channel through which leadership talents are coordinated and individual efforts expanded into a single, significant, volunteer force to improve the quality of life in the community.

Altrusa is a builder of women — a search for the best in character, in business and in citizenship. Membership is extended, by invitation, to individuals representing diverse professional and business activities.

Boccella said she expects about 500 or so people to attend the tour, which had to be canceled last year due to inclement weather.

"We are very hopeful that the weather will cooperate this year," Boccella said.

This will be the 20th year for the tour. Proceeds from the tour will benefit ACCESS, Ames Historical Society Building Fund and the Emergency Residence Project. A scholarship will also be provided to an adult woman who is returning to college, as well as to a high school senior entering college.

Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. Advance tickets can be purchased at Everts Flowers Plants and Gifts, Coe's Floral and Gifts, Mary Kay's Flowers and Gifts Inc., Knapp-Tedesco Insurance and Finesse Spa Salons.

Corporate sponsors of the home tour are First National Bank; Ver Helst Chiropractic; Mary Kay's Flowers and Gifts Inc.; Shoppes on Grand; Exchange State Bank; C&K Plumbing, Heating and Cooling; Alliance General Insurance; Winkler and Sons Inc.; Kitchen, Bath and Home; Central Iowa Fencing; Knapp-Tedesco Insurance; Quilting Connection; and Friedrich Realty.

The following homes are on the Holiday Home Tour 2008:



Sharon and Don Wirth
803 Burnett Ave.
Old Town Historic District

It is believed this home was built in 1895. The architecture is Queen Anne style. It features an oval window on the front facade, ornamental shingles in the gables; gabled dormers; 2-story bay with windows; narrow wood siding; wrap around porch with round classical columns, square spindled railing, and a gazebo-like corner; and a second-story porch with a round classical column and square-spindle railing. Inside three different types of wood have been used: oak, maple and fir. The original, ornate fireplace features two levels of round columns, carved leaves, egg-and-dart trim and wood beading, all in oak. Beveled, leaded, etched and stained glass is found in the home. Two sets of pocket doors are found on the main floor. The front foyer features an oak stair case with raised panels and beaded wood molding.

Don is the director for finance and administration for Iowa Public Radio; Sharon is lab coordinator and lecturer in the Textiles and Clothing Program, AESHM Department at Iowa State University. Their daughter Wendy lives in the third floor apartment.

Located in the Old Town Historic District, the Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity started their chapter in this house in 1907. By 1917 it was occupied by the Kappa Delta Sorority. By the 1980's, the Wirths engaged in extensive restoration, working from an historic photo in the home. Inside, care has been taken to honor the historic form with few changes to adapt the home to modern living. Restoration has been done by the Wirths themselves and several talented area contractors.



Stan Rabe
219 Wildflower Drive
Barbie's Dream House

This home is owned by Stan Rabe, an Internal Audit Trainer for IBM. When Stan moved back to Ames he spent more than a year looking for the right house.

Upon touring this house he knew it met his needs and to this day he refers to it as Barbie's Dream House!

The home was built in the late 1980s and is set on a wooded lot. Stan recently remodeled the kitchen. The home showcases artwork from his travels. There are pieces from France, Italy and Greece. In addition, there are antique armoires from France. Stan is usually out of town for Christmas, so the last people to decorate this home were "Barbie and Ken!"



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Rollie and Willie Struss
191 W. Riverside Road
Country Charm

The original house on the prairie was built in the late 1800s by pioneer settlers. A trapper's cabin from the Skunk River bottom was pulled up to the farmyard to be attached to the original house to create a kitchen in the early 1900's. The growing family needed more room so a 2-story addition was added to the home in about 1920. The next owner added running water in the house in the mid 1940s and a small porch to contain the laundry facilities and an entry porch.

The Strusses bought the house in this configuration in 1969. With a family of six they wanted more living space, so the front porch was removed and a large living room was built on to provide more room. Access to the original cellar, with a dirt floor in part of it, was still from an outside entrance. To change this entrance to the interior of the house, an addition was added to entire east side of the house that provided about 500-sq.-ft. of space that included the basement stairs, a new entry porch and better access to the large living room. Finally, an addition was added to the kitchen to change the stairway leading to the three bedrooms upstairs.



J.D. and Pam Schlieman
4882 Copperstone Drive
Tree House

The homeowners moved to Ames from Story City nearly two years ago after living in Story City for 13 years. J.D. is president of Hawkeye Energy Holdings and Pam is a "retired" early childhood consultant.

The home is 1 1/2 stories and was built in 2000 by Rich Lepper Construction for his personal residence. It is in a beautiful setting surrounded by trees. Each room of the house has a great view of the trees. There is beautiful cherry woodwork throughout the main level of the house. The most unique feature is the "tree" on the wall in the entry way.

Since purchasing the home, the Schliemans have finished an extra bedroom downstairs, and converted the "granny's attic" into a nursery/playroom for their grandchildren.

This is the first year the family has fully decorated and will have a Christmas tree in their home. Their children have made it very clear the main tree has to be a real one! The home will also display the many snowmen Pam has collected over the years.

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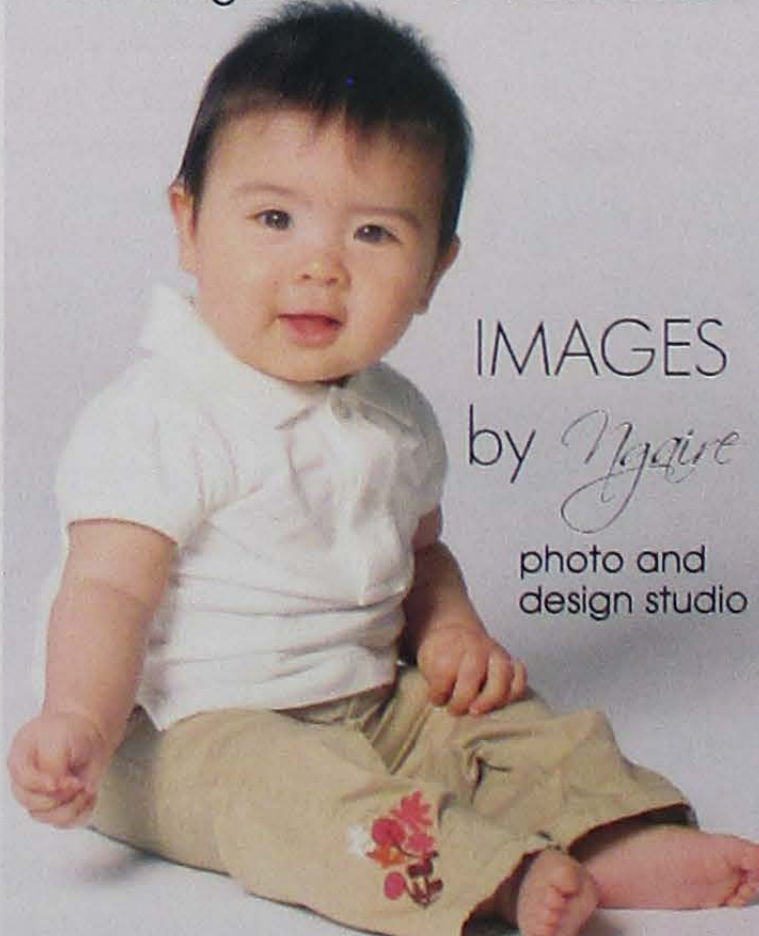
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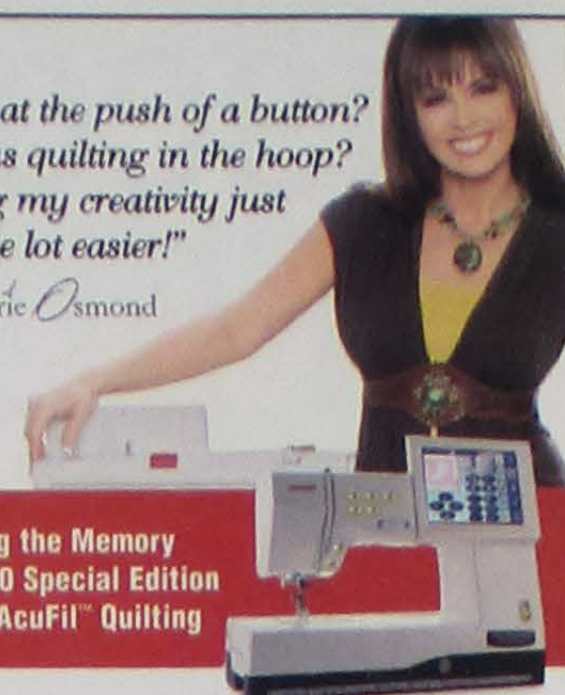
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By PEGGY BEST

232-2182. Yep, that's the phone number that will forever be ingrained into my head.

232-2182 was my parent's phone number. The big black heavy phone set on top of my dad's desk, a sacred area where you weren't ever to touch a thing, or dare to open a drawer. It was fun to sit on his chair and talk on the phone. I felt important just being at the desk. As a young child in the '60s, 232-2182 was one of eight numbers in our party-line. Everybody knew everybody, so just by picking up the phone and hearing a conversation, you knew who it was. It was probably the best way to find out what was going on all over Story County. Eavesdropping was a form of entertainment on the farm. Mom and I would hold the phone between us and we could find out who had the biggest tomatoes, who had the best corn yield, whose tractor broke down, or who had the most unruly teenager at the time. I think in the mid-70s that would have probably been me. Of course, the eavesdropping was only done after dad went to bed. To my dad, phones were for business only and a necessary evil.

During my teenage years that phone was red hot with all the phone calls to girlfriends and chatting going on, but only after dad was down for the night. Sometimes, if I didn't hear dad snoring to confirm he was sound asleep, I'd put a blanket over my head when I was talking, just to keep the noise down. In a huge farmhouse the distance from the desk to the bedrooms was quite a leap, but sometimes dad had extrasensory hearing when you really didn't want him to, especially when the boys started to call. Dad's hearing improved a lot that year.

I married at 18 and my husband soon joined the military and off we moved to California. We couldn't afford a phone, so it was a half-mile walk to the nearest pay phone to call home. I'd place a collect call, and if mom wasn't home and dad answered, he wouldn't accept the charges. That way I would know to call later when mom would be home. At first I took offense "my dad didn't want to talk to me!" but I soon realized it was common sense to him to wait until mom was home so we could chat. Dad wasn't much for chatting, especially on the phone.

Soon I moved back to my beloved hometown and started a family. Dialing 232-2182 led to all the answers about colic, tummy aches, cooking and babysitting needs. The number

"I think it's what I missed more than anything, wanting to call just to chat."

232-2182 was a lifeline to me. And mom, having been the oldest daughter with seven siblings, knew all the answers. When my marriage got rough and I was struggling with some big issues, 232-2182 was my therapist.

After my kids were grown and gone, 232-2182 still answered cooking questions and was my sounding board for everyday life, but things were changing. I was calling to check up on mom and dad, to make sure everything was OK. I'd call to see if they needed me to pick up extra groceries when I ran into town. I received calls from 232-2182 with requests for rides to doctor appointments, or to "come quick" when dad fell. After dad passed away in 2002, 232-2182 became a daily occurrence. I lived close by, so I'd either stop in daily or call to make sure things were going OK. I would get very anxious when I'd call 232-2182 and nobody answered. Sometimes mom would have a friend pick her up and they'd go to lunch, or she'd be down the hall visiting with her neighbor and my anxieties were for naught, but the worry started to sink in.

I lost my mom this past April and it was an unbelievable feeling to not pick up that phone every day and call. I think it's what I missed more than anything, wanting to call just to chat. The day that I had to contact the phone company and request a disconnect was the most difficult task I had to do. I even had the customer service rep shedding a tear with me. 232-2182 is no longer my mom and dad's phone number, but it will always be special to me and forever it will hold a very special place in my heart, never to be forgotten.



A German Christmas

By SUE ULLESTAD

Germany ... the country of my ancestry ... my dream vacation. So when I wanted to write about celebrating Christmas in Germany, I drove out to see my mother's friend, Margaret (Feyler) Fibikar, of rural Boone. When I asked Margaret what she remembered about Christmas growing up in Germany, her eyes lit up.

Margaret was born in Latvia, but soon moved to Poland. Later she moved to Leipzig, East Germany and then to Darmstadt, West Germany. She was one of nine children. Her grandmother also lived with them. Each region had different customs making the Feyler family Christmas a conglomeration of traditions.

The season of Advent was observed by opening one window on an advent calendar each day before Christmas beginning on the first day of December. Some calendar windows opened to verses; other years the windows opened to a piece of chocolate candy. An Advent wreath was placed on the table, a circular form holding four red candles with greenery. The candles were lit in the evening as the family sang old familiar Christmas songs and hymns in German with much anticipation of the birth of the Christ Child.

On the evening of Dec. 5, children put their shoes and boots by the outside door with the expectation that Saint Nicholas would come and fill them in the wee hours of the morning with candy, nuts, and fruit. Saint Nicholas was a slender saint with a brown cloak, unlike our rendition of Santa Claus.

Margaret recalled the Christmas décor always included a Christmas tree. She reminded me that Martin Luther was the one to begin this tradition used in many countries today. Their tree was adorned with silver tinsel and candles which were only lit on Christmas Eve after church for 20 minutes and then blown out. Other homemade decorations were placed on the tree. Paper stars folded in a special way and hung by a thread and walnuts wrapped in gold leaf were common ornaments. Lebkuchen (molasses/ spice cookies) were formed into small shapes and hung on the tree. (Margaret remembers the fun taking down the tree after Christmas and eating the lebkuchen.) Gingerbread houses were also made from this special dough. Margaret's Christmas tree today looks much like the tree of her youth



Margaret making the paper star ornaments as she learned growing up in Germany.

with real candles and all.

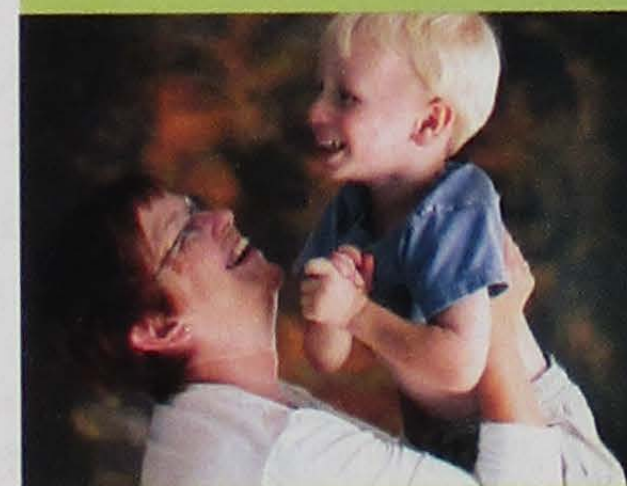
Wooden manger scenes called pyramids rise to a wooden bladed fan. Small candles make the top fan move and thus the whole manger scene rotates. Margaret has several of these nativities and so do I. My Aunt Ruth had traveled to Germany and given them to me as a gift. Pyramids and the tall wooden nutcrackers are made in Seiffen, East Germany. Margaret carefully gets her nutcracker collection out each year to display.

The Feyler family made special Christmas treats to be enjoyed by all. Marzipan is a sweet, almond white dough formed into the shape of strawberries or lemons and painted with food coloring. Christmas stollen is a heavy, raisin bread with currants and almonds. This long flat bread is formed in a special way that when sliced, looks like the Christ Child wrapped in swaddling clothes. Margaret used to make stollen after moving to the United States, but now admits that it is much easier to buy it at Aldi's.

Margaret fondly remembers Christmas Eve as a child. Her parents decorated the Christmas tree that morning as was the custom. It was placed in a special room and the door was closed. The children were not allowed to look at the tree until after "children's church." All of the children went to church at 6 pm while the parents got the children's gifts placed within the dining room table under the removable top. The gifts were

continued on page 21

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Another World

JENNI SABINO

A writer in the making

By JANE M. ZANTOW

We are only allowed glimpses into the extraordinariness of ordinariness, but the thrill of discovering those glimpses quickly teaches us where to look. Any objective observer will soon discover the skits, plays, musicals, dramas and singing voice of Jenni Sabino as just such a glimpse. Given uncommonly beautiful gifts in this creative outlet, she pushes herself to express the surprising journey of typical souls in a world filled with choices. On Dec. 9 to 14, Cornerstone Church of Ames is hosting the Christmas musical, "Esmerelda," written, directed and narrated by Jenni Sabino. Last year, nearly 6,000 tickets were sold for the 10 performances of her first large-scale drama, "Christmas Came One Night." Thirty-two years-old with three children ages 7, 9, and 10, Jenni quickly explains she never thought she would be writing plays and acting. Curious, I ask about her prolific ability to produce scripts.

FACETS: "As a child, did you find that your imagination worked overtime? Were you always dreaming up plays or acting and singing?"

JENNI: "I was always dreaming about it. But I was so shy. It wasn't until after high school that I had the guts to sing solos and act. As a kid I would watch shows and think about what I would do."

And what she would do continues to evidence itself, as this is now the second large-scale production she has written for. In past years, Jenni and her friends, Holly Bodin and Teresa Dodge, wrote for what they called The Women's Dinner Theater. It was an evening during the holidays when women from the church could invite their friends for a ladies night out.

JENNI: "We wanted to find a way to bring friends together where they could let down their hair, and yet it has a point. Not your normal 'mug and muffin.' God is the creator of humor and it brings people together."

Those evenings consisted of dinner, comedy skits and touching music. One minute you were moved to tears from laughter and the next from sympathetic and inspiring song. The characters that rolled out of those skits reached into that ordinariness and pulled out the extraordinary hilarity and beauty of our humanness. The Dinner Theaters consisted of a show called Radio Dinner Theatre and then in the following year, The Sullivan Sisters. Such hilarity quickly got the word out that Jenni needed a larger audience, and not just the ladies. The following year she was asked to write for the church's holiday production.

FACETS: "What have you gained a greater appreciation for in working on these musicals?"

JENNI: "I didn't think I could write full blown dramas until I was asked to write 'Christmas Came One Night.' I could write music, but I didn't know I could write dramas."

FACETS: "So you've gained a greater appreciation of your writing ability then?"

JENNI: "Yeah. I didn't even know I was a writer. From writing I've learned how to be a better writer."

FACETS: "How are the skits different from this large scale production?"

JENNI: "Dinner theatre was way more laid back. If you messed up it was almost funnier. We could pull those off in a few days. The productions are a lot more work. I feel it weighs on me year 'round. As far as music goes, it's months of writing music. We start talking about the next one in February and March,

because there are so many more details involved in pulling it off."

FACETS: "How time consuming are the musicals?"

JENNI: "Practice twice a week until Thanksgiving, then almost everyday. It gets pretty intense after Thanksgiving."

FACETS: "Who is all involved?"

JENNI: "Stage crew, carpenters, painters, actors, musicians, writers, costume designers, stage designers, choreographers ..."

FACETS: "Gathering such a vast crew as this on a volunteer level with only a few paid staff has to account for an extreme amount of cooperation. What is the glue that holds you all together?"

JENNI: "I totally believe this is for a greater purpose. God has gifted us all in different ways. When you put it all together it comes off pretty well. For people who aren't paid professionals it says a lot."

FACETS: "How would you describe this year's Christmas production?" Wide eyed and obviously excited to share her enthusiasm she holds back the details and simplifies.

JENNI: "Another world."

FACETS: "What will make us want to venture out on a cold December night to see 'Esmerelda?'"

JENNI: "It will be a fun, exciting night of singing and dancing! There are moving moments too."

FACETS: "Will we have warm fuzzy holiday feelings though? What is your intention in removing the traditional Christmas scenario?"

JENNI: "Come to the play and find out!"

Sitting patiently for my questions after finishing hours of a Saturday practice, Jenni mentions there's some people needing a ride home from her. Still curious about those scripts, I resolve to see the musical. Guess I will go to the play and find out. "Another world?" But I kind of like this one. Why would I want to venture elsewhere? Well, maybe somewhere in "Esmerelda" I will get a glimpse of that incredible extraordinariness in ordinariness. Most certainly I'll witness again a woman gifted in music and drama who desires to share from those gifts.

Note: Tickets for "Esmerelda" can be purchased at Cornerstone Church of Ames. For more information, call (515) 232-5488 or go online to cornerstonelife.com. Tickets are \$5 each if purchased at Cornerstone or \$7 each if purchased online.

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When John and Julie Dickerson decided to improve their home, they jumped in with both feet. With plans to transform a small bedroom into a large master suite, replace the roof and siding over the entire house, and add energy efficient windows, the Dickersons needed an experienced contracting team capable of handling a wide variety of jobs. Because they were financing the remodel with savings, they also needed a contractor who would stick to their budget and accommodate their request to perform some of the work themselves. The Ames Contracting Team was a perfect fit.

"Once they started that job, there was someone there all the time," John Dickerson explained. "Oren Geisinger is an awesome contractor and he has great people working with him. Holy smokes is he knowledgeable!"

The couple began by working with an ACT designer to help them plan the bedroom of their dreams at a price they could afford. The job involved moving the front of their house out 10 feet, adding a large walk-in closet and a luxurious new master bath. "There were a couple of things we changed our mind about after construction began," recalled Dickerson. "We said we wanted a larger shower. That meant moving a wall. Oren said no problem. We said we wanted a window in the bathroom. He said no problem. They were very accommodating. I am not a contractor. I don't know the jargon but he understood what we wanted. He is the easiest

guy in the world to work with and the entire crew was just great."

ACT devoted as much energy and care to the work performed on the home's exterior. "You would have to witness the roofers to believe it," Dickerson said. "My dad was a roofer. I spent a lot of time on roofs as a teenager. I have never seen a crew work harder in all my life." The entire roof was replaced in a single day and the clean-up was exceptional. "By the time they left that day there wasn't a nail left on the ground," Dickerson marveled, adding that the siding was replaced with speed and skill as well.

The Dickersons made the choice to perform some of the lighter-weight jobs themselves, tiling their bathroom, painting the home's interior, adding stone detail to the front of the house. While they enjoyed the tasks, it certainly intensified their appreciation for the efforts ACT had put forth. "Boy it was a lot of work!" laughed Dickerson, adding the sense of accomplishment was worth it.

With the entire project now complete, the home looks terrific from the street but the master suite is the real treasure for the Dickersons. "The walk-in closet turned out to be a real boon," Dickerson said. "It just keeps all the clutter out of the bedroom. It's more like a changing room than a closet." With an oversized shower in the new bathroom, more square footage throughout the room, and beautiful new windows, the entire master suite is a luxurious oasis.

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Families patiently wait for their monthly groceries.

By KAREN PETERSEN

Every year the same projection is made, sales will be off, and people will reduce the amount of money they spend this holiday season.

This year is different

It is not just the retailers predicting lower sales, I hear people, real people, expressing concerns about the "state of the economy." The concern with the state of the economy is real, not just media manufactured; even people with secure jobs are feeling the effects.

The Kayser family, Tiffany, Jarrod and 21-month-old Mia, like many of us, feel the effect of the higher cost of food. Tiffany said, "Our family doesn't really have a groceries/food budget. I usually just pick up what looks good. Lately the weekly trip to the grocery store doesn't bring home as much as it used to. I can't believe how much a loaf of bread, milk and eggs cost. A few months ago I spent \$80 to \$100 a week, now our family usually spends anywhere from \$130 to \$160. We cut

down on eating out; I use coupons, buy more generic brands, and buy meat in bulk."

If you, like the Kayzers, pay more for groceries and money is tight for you and your family, read on. You may gain a new appreciation for your economic situation.

Here is a story of a family that does not have secure income; "A destitute young mother and her three small children came into the church and asked the pastors for some food. The pastors provided a few food items from the church kitchen and then invited the congregation to bring food items to the Thanksgiving service to be used for emergency distribution."

This was 1973; this family was the beginning of the Bethesda Community Food Pantry. Today, 25 years later, the food pantry serves more than 400 families.

Mission Statement

"The Bethesda Community Food Pantry demonstrates Jesus' love for others by providing supplemental food to all who ask." Roy Hougen, who, with his wife Pat, manages the Bethesda Food Pantry said "We focus on the Ames community, but do not turn others away. We do not ask for verification of need. We feel that people do not go to food pantries unless there is a need; for most people it is a humbling experience."

Recipients can come for food once each month. And the number of families using the pantry has grown:

- In 2000 208 families
- In 2004 335 families
- In 2007 410 families

So far in 2008 the average number is 418. Even though there is not a significant increase in the number of families using the food pantry from 2007 to 2008, Hougen is quick to add, "I think a point can be made that even though there has not been a large increase in use the past year, the fact is that 10 to 11 percent of the residents in Story County have incomes at or below the poverty line, that number is not decreasing, and in fact may be increasing with the increased costs of food, gas and utilities. This is a situation that will continue to impact the need for some families to receive supplemental food."

You can help

You can contribute money, food items or time. The food pantry is supported entirely by donations and contributions of individuals and organizations in Ames and the Story County community. If you can help, contact the Bethesda Lutheran church office, (515) 232-6256. Volunteer opportunities range from sorting food to stocking shelves to working directly with the recipients.

As you think about "the economy," do you become a little glum thinking you will not be able to spend as much on the holidays this year? And when the holidays are over do you ever wonder if all your frantic preparation and spending was really appreciated?

I guarantee, and you know in my business I never make a guarantee, if you share your time and money with those who do not have enough food for their family you will never wonder if you did the right thing, you will have a deep appreciation for all you have and your ability to share with others.

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Karen L Petersen CFP®/CFA™ is a fee based financial advisor. You can contact her at 515 232 2785 or karen@mymorethanmoney.net

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A German Christmas continued from page 17

covered in this way to remain a secret even longer. Each child received a couple simple gifts from the Christ Child. If they had been naughty, the parents placed a broomstick across the table indicating a "whipping" instead. One year, Margaret's parents laid the broomstick on the table as a joke making the children feel so disappointed as if they had been too naughty that year. She laughs now, but not at the time when she and her brothers and sisters walked in that dining room and first saw the broomstick. As the gifts were opened, each child had a plate of Christmas treats to nibble on all evening or place in their room to eat later. At midnight, the whole family went to church. While living in Leipzig, East Germany, the Feyler family attended the same Lutheran church whereby Johann Sebastian Bach had been buried.

On Christmas Day 1 (Dec. 25) and Christmas Day 2 (Dec. 26), the aunts and uncles came to celebrate Christ's birth. The Christmas goose was ready. Sweet and sour red cabbage, sauerkraut and Christmas stollen was eagerly consumed. Goose grease was spread on bread like butter. Everyone had those two days off from work to be with family members.

Margaret was reminiscent of the

Christmas markets in the bigger cities and in some smaller villages. Booths were crowded into the downtown streets with various vendors. Shoppers walked all bundled-up drinking hot cider, hot chocolate or coffee to ward off the cold. They could purchase baked goods and gifts. Large Christmas trees in muted white lights adorned the downtown area. Margaret added that there were not as many outside Christmas lights as we have here in America.

I saw a glimpse of Germany while conversing with Margaret. She still holds fast to her German Christmas customs yet interweaving some American traditions. I am proud to say that I do consciously and unconsciously observe some of those same German ways. I use an Advent calendar and Advent wreath every year. I have German wooden manger pyramids as well as a Christmas tree, of course. My family sings hymns and hears scripture readings of the Christ Child on Christmas Eve in the same German Lutheran church as Margaret and her husband, Edwin, attend. Though I put candy, fruit, nuts, and small gifts in stockings for the family instead of our shoes and boots; it is close to the same. Maybe I'll go to Aldi's and try some stollen this year!

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An Iowa Christmas Tradition Wild plum pudding

Each December our family gathers together to celebrate Christmas. Much of our time is spent preparing favorite dishes passed down through the years. Wild plum pudding is one of our oldest family recipes. My maternal great-grandmother Cora Newell, who was raised near Eldora where stands of wild plums were plentiful, passed the recipe on to Josephine Hess, her daughter and my grandmother, in 1908. Great-grandmother Newell received the recipe from her grandparents who raised her, so the recipe originated well more than 100 years ago.

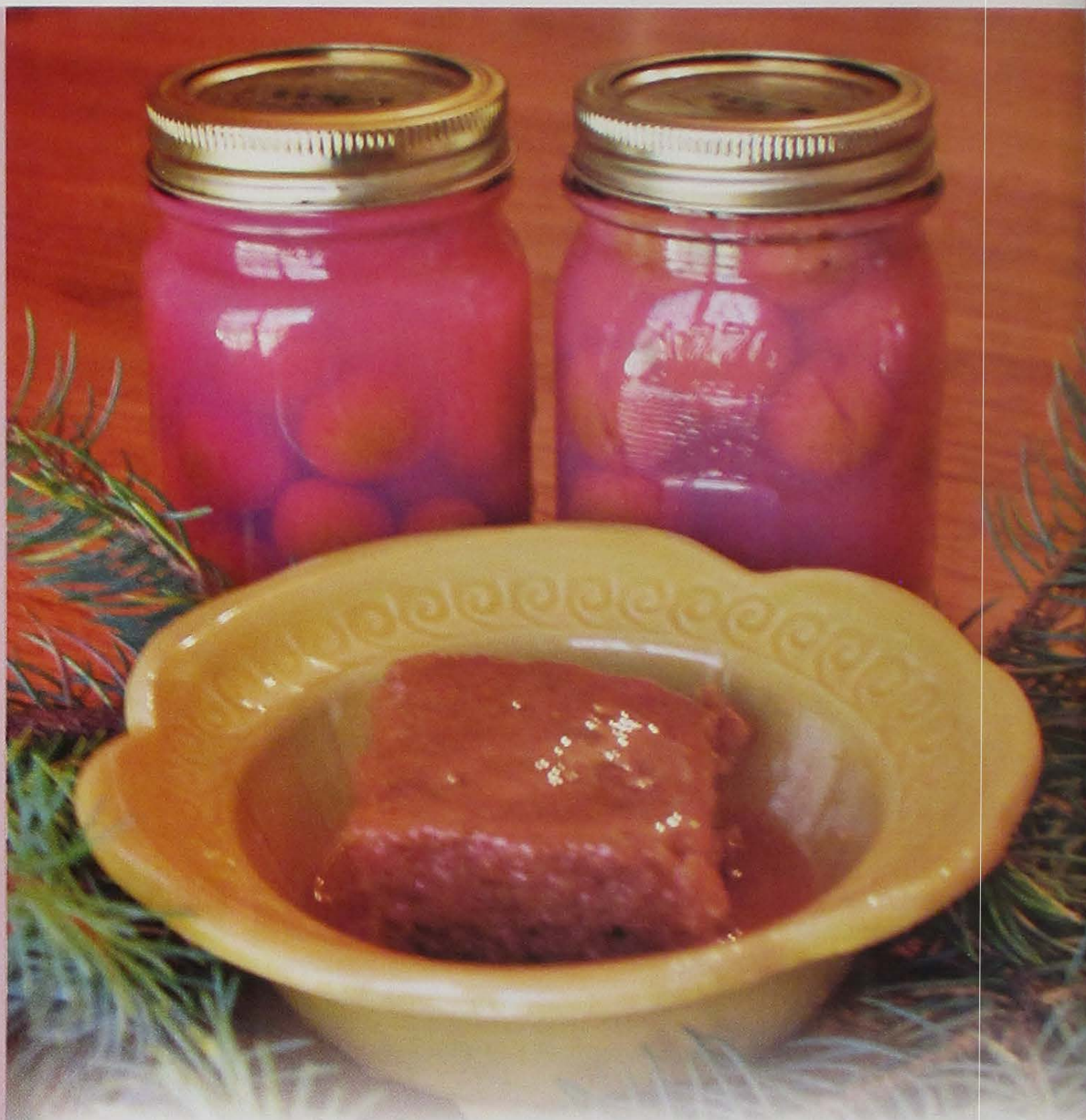
Grandma Josie doubled or tripled the recipe to feed all of her grandchildren when we gathered for Christmas in the 1950s and 60s. These days, one pudding feeds everyone at our smaller Christmas gathering. But we still fight over who gets to make the plum sauce because of our cook-friendly family tradition: whoever makes the sauce gets to lick the last tangy-sweet drops off the wooden spoon.

Preserving the Fruit

Wild plums can be frozen, but should be canned if you want the juice for this recipe. Can the plums in pint jars, but pour hot water rather than sugar syrup over the packed fruit. Process according to canning directions for tart cherries or plums.

How to Find Wild Plums

Wild plums can still be found in Iowa. When the white, flowering pears start blooming around town, drive into the countryside and hunt for clusters of wild plum bushes along old fence rows and the perimeters of wooded areas. Their blossoms are snowy white and very fragrant. The fruit ripens in July or August so check the bushes frequently and pick the fruit before the birds do.



Wild Plum Pudding

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 cup sugar | 1 teaspoon soda |
| 1 cup butter | ¼ teaspoon cloves |
| 2 eggs | 1 teaspoon cinnamon |
| 1 cup buttermilk | 1 teaspoon nutmeg |
| 2 cups flour | 1 cup canned wild plums |
| 1 teaspoon soda | (or canned tart pie cherries) - |
| | pit, drain and keep juice |

Pudding: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream sugar, butter and eggs. Combine dry ingredients (flour, soda, and spices) and alternate adding dry ingredients and buttermilk to creamed mixture. Carefully fold in plums. Pour into a greased 9 x 13 pan. Bake 35 – 45 minutes.

Plum Sauce: Drain plum juice into a two cup measuring cup. Add 1 tablespoon lemon juice and enough water to equal two cups. (My sister adds ¼ cup rum in place of some of the water.) Pour into a sauce pan. Blend together 1 cup brown sugar and 1 ½ tablespoons cornstarch. Add to liquid in pan and cook over medium heat until it thickens. Add 1 tablespoon butter and 1 teaspoon vanilla.

To serve: Cut into squares and serve with warm plum sauce.



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The gift in music

By JANE M. ZANTOW

Seven years old, and imagining an entire heavenly host of angels, I make my way to the Christmas crèche down the street in front of my home town library.

Huge snow banks. Dim light. Sparkles from new snow shooting like stars all around, changing the appearance of almost everything. Huge crystal flakes still falling with each expectant step I take. Finally I'm there. I have something to give tonight. Inspired by all of the new snow, and thinking long about that baby in the manger, I move closer.

Where is the music coming from? Is it angels I hear? Well ... the figures are in fact plastic, no getting around that, but the hay is real. Everything smells real anyway. And maybe ... just maybe ... the music is true heavenly music. Maybe ... my imagination stretches still further as I take the candy from my pocket to place it in the manger. I know it's only candy, but He understands. Maybe baby Jesus counts it as a gift, so here is my gift. Satisfied, I turn. Feet cold. Heart warm. Heart filled with wonder.

Now, back to the house where my mother is. Recently divorced, she drinks too much. Her distance creates a different kind of cold. At least now she is away from the abuse, but where is she? Where did she go? Her gaze is out the window not toward me. But during the holidays there is sometimes a change in her mood. The shadow strays from her face long enough to allow for a smile. She plays recordings from her collections. Traditional carols go side-by-side with the buttery tones of Nat King Cole, Elvis Presley and the astoundingly comical Alvin and the Chipmunks. The hope is not forgotten. She still grabs hold of the singing. My mother doesn't tell me, but I know somehow this is stronger than her sorrow.

Now a grown woman, my memories flit like the light of a candle. Here and there, yet steady and strong, burning hot with the central love I have within -- memories recapture the moment. My mother's love for music did not pass away with her. I still remember her amber colored voice and the way she belted out Christmas songs. Annual sounds rekindle a spark of optimism that echoes aimlessly. Music of the season recaptures moments that were framed with that optimism. I was told something in those songs.

I recall the night my daughter pinned a musical diamond to my heart. The recollection creates an emotion that floods my mind, replacing worry with anticipation. It was just five years ago and I was no longer an innocent child. This night I greet the holiday season with tangled worries as I run from my car to the school. Exposed to wind and icy air, I am not wanting the cold, and there is little impressing me about the snow. I grab hold of the high school door, pull it

toward me and enter the warm catch-all. Why is opening the door difficult? Why am I so tired? Is this worth the rush? The coldness will stay here. One more door and now the warmth of the auditorium. I take my seat, rest my body, and stop the anxiety. Time to listen. No time to worry. Thoughts of concern untangle further as I hear a soft un-amplified choir coming from behind. Blended sounds are nearing. Many voices are joined in song. Clearly, the penetrating and beautiful sound is approaching.



Unexpectedly, the Community Choir appears streaming in from behind me. They've taken us all by surprise. This is a fund-raiser, I'm told. This is for Habitat for Humanity and my small donation is nothing in comparison to the rich reward of being there for this glimpse of peace. Do they know that they touch me so? Do they know of my son's difficulties? Do they know how I'm so concerned for his future? How could they? Yet, the words they sing are telling me something. True peace in this expression. Rested peace. Trusted peace. They sing!

My daughter is amidst the choir, so I strain to find her. Where is she? So many faces! Oh my, the faces are familiar! I know these people! My goodness! There's my tax lady! There's my son's teacher! There's that woman who works behind the counter at ...

where have I seen her face? I can't recall. I know these people, they are my community! A steady stream of familiar faces, all in gowns, carrying lighted candles and singing the annual joyful sound. These people live a life like mine. Some days their brows are furrowed. I know because I've seen them! But tonight they're all smiling. They're all singing. Their words are telling me something. My eyes barely retain the tears. My thoughts race forward. Just stop. Don't weep now. Wait ... hold up, girl.

The choir takes the stage. Candles extinguished; the program begins. Wipe away that tear. Listen now. Allow for more and wait ... Oh, there she is! There's Virginia! OK, this will help me to focus.

"... Silent night. Holy night. All is calm. All is bright.

Round yon Virgin Mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace ... "

Then a special. Something other than traditional. My daughter amidst the quartet? She didn't tell me. Or, did I forget because of my worries and busyness? Softly and gently the song begins, and its words create a longing that draws me in and away from the impossible.

"... Breath of Heaven, hold me together.
Be forever near me, Breath of Heaven.
Breath of Heaven, Light in my darkness,
Pour over me Your holiness, for You are holy.

Breath of Heaven ... help me be strong.
Help me be. Help me ... "

I sat there stunned. My daughter had no idea of the preciousness of her gift. Just a song? Hardly! Sitting there in my weakness someone pointed to strength. Someone sang over me the promise of a Savior! There is something greater than my sorrow and fear. I can continue and He is near, the song seemed to say. God with us, Emmanuel. God with this community. God with me.

The stillness created by that song, as well as its arrangement, lingered. When the concert ended I headed back to the reality of winter outside, but sparkling inside even brighter than my childhood memory of snow was the musical diamond my daughter had pinned to my heart. Something greater than any of those tangled worries resounded once again. This is all just time passing! There are gifts to give! There are gifts to receive! There is something beyond what I see and is greater than what I can make of it. Hope shines and will not fade.

Instilled in vibrant song this holiday season are words of hope to bring us peace. Echoing again are those annual words of joy. Heralding still, is the message that even a child can appreciate, God with us, Emmanuel.

hue & cry

By MARY HALSTRUM, Facets Editor

By the time you read this column, you've already survived the biggest shopping day of the year, the day after Thanksgiving, otherwise known as Black Friday. Unfortunately, this holiday season many retailers may be singing the blues instead of jingle bells when the receipts are tallied due to a struggling economy. Consumers just don't have as much disposable income to spend on holiday shopping, which affects the bottom lines of retail stores nationwide. So instead of feeling like Santa Claus and buying up gifts galore, shoppers may be acting more like Ebenezer Scrooge, not by choice, but out of necessity.

My husband and I have already discussed how this holiday season might not be as bountiful in the gift department as years past. Most likely we will forego gifts for each other in lieu of getting more for our two daughters. I've thought about telling Katharine, 6, and Rachel, 2, that an economic downturn has affected Santa's toy budget, but I don't think they'd buy that one.

This year we've decided to make a holiday shopping budget and then actually stick to it. Starting with Christmas 2006,

we started using cash only to purchase all gifts, which helped ease the after-holiday stress that comes from opening credit card bills come January. We will also be taking advantage of layaway, which is making a comeback in light of the nation's recent economic woes.

We should also remember those less fortunate than ourselves this holiday season. There are mothers and fathers who can barely afford to stock their refrigerator let alone buy Christmas presents for their little ones. So please don't forget the local toy drives seeking donations when you're out buying gifts for your loved ones.

Christmas is my favorite holiday by far. It always has been, and the excitement hasn't dwindled as I've gotten older. If anything, it only increased after my daughters came along. One thing the girls and I have made a tradition out of is to start playing our Christmas CDs in the car right around Halloween. It drives my husband crazy, but we do it anyway.

This year we haven't decided whether we will use our artificial Christmas tree or purchase a real one. It doesn't really matter as long as we have a tree to decorate.

Definition: Any loud clamor or protest intended to incite others to action.

Once the tree is up, out from the basement come the boxes filled with our favorite ornaments. Decorating the tree takes a little longer because my daughters help me with everything; the tree skirt, the lights, the individual ornaments, the garland, and of course, the tree topper.

After the tree's all done, I get the girls all gussied up in their holiday dresses, and take their picture in front of the tree. That picture will be the one sent out with our Christmas cards to family and friends.

Soon it will be Christmas Eve and the yearly tradition of putting out cookies and milk for Santa Claus continues. We've been doing this since Katharine was about two-years-old. We also include a note for Santa. When the girls wake up on Christmas morning, the cookies and milk are gone and Santa's note to Katharine and Rachel replaces the one that was left for him. The girls really get a kick out of that.

Now it's time to open the gifts, which usually takes about 30 minutes. All that budgeting, planning and shopping, and it's over in what seems like the blink of an eye. Oh well, only 364 shopping days left until next Christmas. I'd better get started.

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meet a faceted woman



From left, Anne, Jolene, Allen and Hiram.



Name: Jolene Philo
Age: 52
Position: Freelance writer and speaker
Family: Hiram (husband)
Allen, Anne (son and daughter)



Jolene with her mother, Dorothea, and her sister, Jacque, in Savannah last spring to celebrate their mother's 80th birthday.

What would you do with \$1,000 to spend on yourself? I would use it to join my nieces, sister-in-law and other family members on a "girls trip" to Italy next June.

I never leave home without:
Business cards

Your favorite motto: With God, all things are possible.

What makes you happy?
Connecting with friends, former students and family.

What makes you feel confident?
My faith.

What makes you laugh? Our family's white elephant gift exchange at Christmas.

What have you accomplished that has made you proud? My first book "A Different Dream for My Child: Meditations for Parents of Critically and Chronically Ill Children," will be released by Discovery House Publishers in the fall of 2009 or early 2010.

Best tip to look and feel great:
Take a long walk every day.

How do you take care of yourself financially? My husband and I never spend more than we take in and we invest some of our income every month.

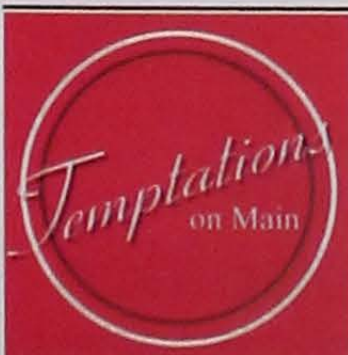
If you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently? I wouldn't have freaked out when my son told us he was going to become a monk. The monastery has matured him, and having a son who's a monk provides great stories for my writing.

How do you reward yourself? Work on the mystery novel my writing partner and I dreamed up.

My simplest pleasure: Reading a good book at night or listening to a book tape when I clean house or cook.

I am thankful for: A very supportive, patient husband

How do you give back to your community? I'm a mentor with the GRIP program, speak to clubs and civic organizations, shop locally when I can.



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What is your favorite kind of chocolate?

JOLENE PHILO:

I love turtles, and I'm developing a taste for anything with dark chocolates – only for the health benefits, of course.

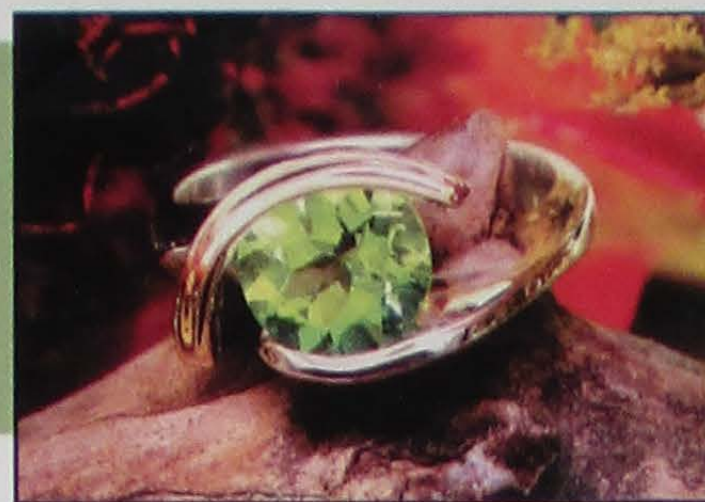


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